

Connecticut Commission on Community Service  
January 2017 – January 2020 State Service Plan



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## **Introduction**

The Connecticut Commission on Community Service (CCCS) is dedicated to incorporating volunteerism into positive personal experiences to strengthen communities. The CCCS was established by Executive Order in 1993, pursuant to the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, to administer service programs in the state and to promote citizenship and service throughout the state. People of all ages and backgrounds are helping to meet local needs, strengthen communities, and increase civic engagement through national service in Connecticut. Connecticut citizens tutor and mentor children, support veterans and military families, provide health services, restore the environment, increase economic opportunity, and recruit and manage volunteers. Since 1994, more than 14,000 Connecticut residents have served more than 19 million hours through AmeriCorps programs and have qualified for Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards totaling more than \$45,270,000. More than 2,000 seniors in Connecticut contribute their time and talents to national service programming. Foster Grandparents serve one-on-one as tutors and mentors to young people who have special needs. Senior Companions help homebound seniors and other adults maintain independence in their own homes. Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers conduct safety patrols, renovate homes, protect the environment, tutor and mentor youth, respond to natural disasters, and provide other services to communities across Connecticut.

In the federal fiscal year 2016, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) committed more than \$10,830,000 to support Connecticut communities through national service. Through a unique public-private partnership, this federal investment leverages an additional \$13,780,000 in other resources to strengthen community impact, build local support, and increase return on taxpayer dollars.

The State Service Plan was developed with broad involvement and guidance from constituents across Connecticut's landscape. Data gleaned from three statewide focus groups (listening tour), responses collected from an online State Service Plan Survey, and the input of Commission members, helped to inform the Commission's operational and programming compass for the next three years. Public feedback was a critical component of ensuring the voices and ideas of many were incorporated into the plan. The Listening Tour was presented as opportunities for individuals who have a unique knowledge about the issues that may affect state service planning decisions, to come together and share thoughts, ideas and or concerns. The listening tour gatherings included Commissioners (leaders in a variety of segments within the volunteer community); independent leaders within the volunteer community; and senior staff in community-based organizations. The plan provides the Connecticut Commission on Community Service with a three-year roadmap for utilizing service as a strategy through evidence-based approaches addressing community challenges. The Commission staff and membership will review progress annually and will review and update the plan as needed from year to year.

## **Our Mission**

The mission of the Connecticut Commission on Community Service is to cultivate and foster a vibrant culture of community service through volunteerism.

## **Vision**

The Connecticut Commission on Community Service is the premier vehicle of volunteerism and civic engagement that address needs of those in our neighborhoods in Connecticut.

### **State Service Plan Goals**

Using the Commission's adapted guiding principles (September 2014) to prioritize essential behavior to achieve the Commission's vision – the developed state service plan identified three areas of opportunity and growth: 1) Develop new service opportunities across urban, rural and suburban communities, 2) Improve the efficiencies of existing national service programs and 3) Expand a culture and climate for service opportunities that utilize volunteers throughout the age continuum

#### *GOAL I. To develop new service opportunities*

One of the core guiding principles of the Commission is to strengthen communities by supporting sustained, well-managed volunteer programming at the local level. In the most compelling listening tour gatherings it became quite apparent that service providers most wanted the Commission to assist them in using service as a strategy to fulfill their missions. In addition they wanted the opportunity to come together to exchange information, share best practices and receive relevant training – but had the least means to accomplish said task. Brokering conversations among practitioners in the field would help orchestrate multiple opportunities for providers and beneficiaries to engage in meaningful exchanges. Although Connecticut is considered a small state (100 miles end to end), often the replication of services occurs due to the myopic view of “we’re the only organization that could be doing this”. As a catalyst to open door conversations amongst community change agents, the Commission would be able to create a means for cross-pollination of ideas to practitioners. These touchpoints are intended to launch new service opportunities.

#### *Activities*

- Expand the technical assistance offered to community stakeholders to use service as a strategy
- Educate public agencies and local governments about accessing national service to support service opportunities
- Facilitate conversations with community-based organizations and nonprofits to partner with public/private funders to develop evidence-based service strategies

#### *GOAL II. To improve the efficiencies of existing national service programs*

We know that operating an AmeriCorps or Senior Corp program requires extensive planning and preparation. Successful national service programs surpass challenges such as managing government grants, raising matching funds, supervising national service participants and designing programs that provide a meaningful service term for members. Connecticut will provide resources to organizations to meet these challenges when implementing a national service program. The Commission has invested significant resources in developing an on-line foundational learning curriculum for current and potential AmeriCorps applicants. The on-line training center provides 101-, 201- and 301-level content to aid programs in design, implementation and compliance. For example, the Criminal History Check 201 Online Training revealed the following:

## Criminal History Check 201 Online Training Feedback, October 2015

Outcomes		
Answer Options	Yes	No
Were the activities in which you participated helpful in illustrating concepts discussed?	100%	0%
Do you anticipate referring to the materials you were provided (notes, presentations, etc.) in your work?	91%	9%
Did this training provide you with professional development?	91%	9%

A respondent stated, "I have a better understanding of CNCS's current guidelines and the possible changes expected to take place in the near future."

Where and where we can, the Commission will offer planning grants to organizations that recognize a community need for services and have an idea for meeting that need, but have not fully developed a plan to provide the needed services through a national service program. The Commission will consider planning grant applications that address a compelling community need in one or more of the following areas: economic opportunity, education, programming for seniors and programming to address the opioid epidemic in Connecticut. The Commission has begun working with the State Office, Campus Compact, congressional staff and others to strategize and augment resources which may compliment efforts within these focus areas. The Commission has leveraged its additional resources to garnish and devise widely useful, cost effective trainings.

### *Activities*

- Improve recruitment enrollment and retention rates through effective volunteer management training for national service programs
- Expand on-line training curriculum
- Competitively fund formula programs after three-years of formula funding
- Meet with other organizations utilizing volunteers (such as the United Ways, Volunteer Centers, AARP and the Red Cross) to share best practices in volunteer recruitment and management, as well as discuss coordinating efforts to jointly publicize one another's volunteer and service opportunities.

### *GOAL III. To expand a culture and climate for service opportunities that utilizes volunteers throughout the age continuum*

Over the course of the next three years, the Commission will undergo an aggressive campaign to further the legitimacy and the stature its work. Inclusive of various service constituents (e.g faith-based organizations, k-12 educational institutions, social service entities, public health organizations and the like), the Commission will organize a methodical dissemination of information about its work and effect on Connecticut communities. A Commission website, annual report and social media accounts are examples of collateral materials that will be developed and widely distributed to stakeholders, elected officials, heads of State Agencies, and the Commission's database

(1,000+ entries). These pieces will promote the collaboration of community service providers with the Commission while also highlighting the impact of national service throughout Connecticut.

#### *Activities*

- Design a communications strategy plan
- Update and maintain CCCS web-site
- Develop a monthly e-mail “news flash” to database

#### **Implementation of the State Service Plan**

The Commission will create three committees to support the work of the three goals identified in the State Service Plan (To Develop, to Improve and to Expand). Two of the committees (To Develop and to Expand) will have appointed staff support, while the committee is led by a Commissioner. The third committee (To improve) will be staff driven and lead. The committees shall meet prior to a scheduled Commission meeting and prepare for reporting out to the full body at the Commission meeting.

As part of the State Service Plan, resources will be discussed amongst the service partners and built into the budget submitted to the Corporation for National and Community Service. Also, the Commission continues to be supported by State appropriated monies to enhance the programs and services the Commission administers throughout the state.

#### **Conclusion**

The 2017-2021 State Service Plan reflects a Connecticut that has engaged and considered many perspectives in the community service landscape. This plan attempts to recognize, respect and employ all spectrums of service. Voices from rural communities, civic groups, corporate volunteers and others were channeled to create an active and living document. The plan is ambitious and strong, visionary and realistic. We envision Connecticut to be a leader in meeting our obligation to be stalwarts of effective, efficient and impactful community service.